



Revitalizing the Sri Lankan Economy: An In-Depth Exploration of Gastro Tourism as a Catalyst for Upliftment – Visitor Perspective

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Keywords:

Gastro Tourism,
Destination
Marketing,
Sri Lanka,
Economic
Development.

Abstract.

This paper explores the transformative potential of Gastro Tourism in Sri Lanka, assessing its ability to attract visitors and stimulate economic growth through the rich tapestry of culinary diversity. This study investigates the personal meanings associated with gastro tourism experiences by utilizing qualitative methods to gather and analyze insights from a diverse cohort of Sri Lankan-bound tourists. The purposive sampling technique ensures a comprehensive understanding, incorporating individuals with extensive knowledge of Sri Lankan food culture and exposure to global gastronomy. The data collection technique involves in-depth interviews, allowing for a nuanced exploration of participants' perspectives on Sri Lankan cuisine and gastro tourism. To ensure trustworthiness, the study adheres to Tracy's (2010) criteria, emphasizing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Thematic analysis is employed for data analysis, revealing five interconnected themes: Economic Transformation Through Culinary Experiences, Empowerment of Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses, Cultural Diplomacy Driving Economic Integration, Holistic Development, and Sustainable Growth and Rural Economic Upliftment. The thematic analysis underscores the multifaceted impact of gastro tourism on Sri Lanka's economic resurgence, portraying it as a catalyst for economic vibrancy, entrepreneurship, cultural diplomacy, holistic development, and sustainable practices.

Kata Kunci:

Wisata Gastro,
Pemasaran
Destinasi,
Sri Lanka,
Pembangunan
Ekonomi.

Abstrak.

Makalah ini mengeksplorasi potensi transformatif dari Wisata Gastro di Sri Lanka, menilai kemampuannya untuk menarik pengunjung dan merangsang pertumbuhan ekonomi melalui kekayaan keragaman kuliner. Studi ini menyelidiki makna pribadi yang terkait dengan pengalaman wisata gastro dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif untuk mengumpulkan dan menganalisis wawasan dari beragam kelompok wisatawan tujuan Sri Lanka. Teknik pengambilan sampel purposif memastikan pemahaman yang komprehensif, menggabungkan individu dengan pengetahuan luas tentang budaya makanan Sri Lanka dan paparan terhadap gastronomi global. Teknik pengumpulan datanya melibatkan wawancara mendalam, yang memungkinkan dilakukannya eksplorasi perspektif peserta mengenai masakan Sri Lanka dan wisata gastro. Untuk memastikan kepercayaan, penelitian ini mengikuti kriteria Tracy (2010), yang menekankan kredibilitas, transferabilitas, ketergantungan, dan konfirmasiabilitas. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk analisis data, mengungkapkan lima tema yang saling berhubungan: Transformasi Ekonomi Melalui Pengalaman Kuliner, Pemberdayaan Pengusaha dan Usaha Kecil, Diplomasi Budaya Mendorong Integrasi Ekonomi, Pembangunan Holistik, dan Pertumbuhan Berkelanjutan dan Peningkatan Ekonomi Pedesaan. Analisis tematik ini menggarisbawahi dampak beragam wisata gastro terhadap kebangkitan ekonomi Sri Lanka, menggambarkan sebagai katalis bagi semangat ekonomi, kewirausahaan, diplomasi budaya, pembangunan holistik, dan praktik berkelanjutan.

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Article history: Received 14th December 2023; Accepted 22nd August 2024; Available 31st August 2024.

1. Introduction

The tumultuous economic landscape that has gripped Sri Lanka since 2019 has posed unprecedented challenges to the nation, marking it as a period of financial crisis that transcends historical precedents. The severity of this crisis is underscored by its designation as the most severe currency emergency experienced by the island nation since gaining independence in 1948. The consequences have been far-reaching, encompassing soaring inflation rates, depletion of foreign reserves, and scarcities in critical sectors such as medical supplies and essential commodities.

In the face of such economic adversity, the need for innovative strategies to revitalize the Sri Lankan economy becomes paramount. This paper explores a novel avenue for economic upliftment – Gastro Tourism. As the study of food as a central motivator for tourism, Gastro Tourism emerges not only as a unique industry perspective but as a potential catalyst for economic rejuvenation. The essence of Gastro Tourism lies in the recognition of culinary experiences as a pivotal aspect of the tourism industry. Moreover, the visitors' penchant for exploring diverse and exceptional culinary offerings has transformed dining into an integral part of the travel experience. This paper explores the multifaceted dimensions of Gastro Tourism, assessing its potential to attract visitors and stimulate economic growth by leveraging the intrinsic appeal of culinary diversity.

It is highlighted in the past literature that Gastro Tourism stands out from other forms of tourism, such as adventure or eco-tourism, by effectively combining cultural, social, and economic advantages (Hall and Sharples, 2003; Richards, 2012). It provides a comprehensive approach to stimulate economic growth and rejuvenation. Gastro Tourism has the ability to contribute to economic improvement in various ways. It not only appeals to tourists from other countries, resulting in the generation of foreign currency, but also supports local food sectors, such as agriculture and hospitality, thereby creating job opportunities and supporting local economies (Everett and Slocum, 2013; Wolf, 2006)). In addition, Gastro Tourism may contribute to the preservation and promotion of Sri Lanka's abundant culinary legacy, enhancing the country's cultural attractiveness and global brand image.

To comprehend the significance of Gastro Tourism in the context of Sri Lanka's economic revival, it is imperative to appreciate the broader culinary or food tourism trends. This mission for extraordinary and fundamental culinary experiences transcends the mere appreciation of exceptional cuisine; it encompasses the entirety of the dining experience, incorporating elements such as ambiance, comfort, and cultural resonance (Dabi, Choudhary, and Sharma, 2022). As we explore the nuances of gastronomic tourism, this paper aims to shed light on its potential to serve as a transformative force, offering a fresh perspective on how Sri Lanka can navigate its economic challenges through the lens of gastronomic exploration, considering the visitor perspectives.

2. Review of Literature

Food tourism, once an overlooked aspect of travel, has gained recognition in recent years as an essential component of the tourist experience. Authors such as Laroja *et al.* (2019) highlight the simplicity of the definition—traveling to consume the food of other destinations. Despite its apparent simplicity, the phenomenon has only recently emerged as a subject of dedicated study, with Montoya-Guevara, Morrow and Benso (2022) noting that it has become a subject in its own right only in recent years. This evolution is integral to understanding the current significance of gastro tourism and its potential role in economic revitalization.

2.1 *Gastro Tourism*

The nexus between social heritage and cuisine in tourism has been extensively explored in the literature. Food, integral to a region's cultural identity, serves as a compelling attraction for tourists seeking authentic experiences (Dabi, Choudhary and Sharma, 2022). In Sri Lanka, the rich tapestry of diverse culinary traditions presents an opportunity to allure visitors in search of exceptional gastronomic experiences (Lokeshwara, Kuruppu and Bandara, 2024; Lokeshwara, 2023).

Food tourism encompasses activities using food as a conduit for connection across people, places, and time (Munasinghe, Gunawardhana and Ariyawansa, 2021). Gastrotourism, a subset of food tourism, entails various culinary experiences such as dining at local establishments, participating in cooking classes or food tours, exploring food markets and farms, and indulging in traditional food and beverages. The focus is on immersing in local food culture, culinary techniques, and the stories behind the dishes (Wicramasooriya, 2023). Gastrotourists, primarily food enthusiasts seeking genuine and memorable culinary encounters, engage in a multitude of experiences. They are intrigued by the intertwining of food and culture, fascinated by historical and regional influences on destination cuisine, and open to exploring new flavours and dishes (Rachão *et al.*, 2019).

Also known as culinary or food tourism, gastrotourism is a specialized form of cultural tourism centered on exploring and appreciating a destination's culinary offerings. It spans a range of experiences, from tasting local dishes and beverages to attending cooking classes, visiting markets, and engaging with food producers. At its core, gastro tourism seeks to provide travelers with a deeper understanding of a region's gastronomic practices, ingredients, and culinary techniques (Nistor and Dezsi, 2022). This form of tourism extends beyond mere dining, evolving into a holistic cultural experience that immerses visitors in the local food ecosystem. It often involves interactions with chefs, artisans, and producers, as well as visits to farms, vineyards, and food-related festivals. Gastrotourism is characterized by its ability to facilitate cultural exchange, offering travellers an intimate glimpse into the practices, traditions, and stories embedded in a destination's cuisine (Putra, 2019).

Furthermore, gastrotourism is closely tied to the concepts of terroir and authenticity. Terroir, originally associated with wine, encompasses natural elements (such as soil, climate, and geography) shaping the taste and character of local products. In the context of gastrotourism, terroir extends to a broader understanding of how a region's natural environment influences its culinary identity. Authenticity, on the other hand, refers to the genuine and unadulterated representation of a destination's culinary heritage. Authentic gastrotourism aims to provide visitors with experiences rooted in the genuine traditions and practices of a region (Vidya, 2021).

As an expanding sector within the global tourism industry, gastro tourism has emerged as a robust economic driver for many destinations. It not only stimulates demand for local food and beverage products but also supports various related industries, including agriculture, hospitality, and food processing. Moreover, gastro tourism has the potential to enhance the overall appeal of a destination, attracting diverse travellers seeking immersive, culturally rich experiences (Deyshappriya and Nawarathna, 2020). For Sri Lanka, a nation renowned for its diverse and delectable cuisine, the integration of gastro tourism presents a unique opportunity to showcase the country's culinary heritage while promoting economic growth and cultural exchange.

2.2 *Gastro Tourism and Economic Development*

Numerous studies highlight the substantial economic impact of culinary tourism on nations and regions. This form of tourism has the potential to extend the reach of the industry, create

employment, and bolster small businesses. Gastro-tourism, in particular, has been shown to boost local economies by generating interest in regional products and culinary items, emphasizing the need to comprehend these economic linkages for potential benefits in Sri Lanka (Manola and Koufadakis, 2019).

Countries like Thailand have successfully established themselves as premier gastro-tourism destinations, boasting a diverse and delectable cuisine, vibrant street food culture, and culinary experiences catering to diverse preferences. In contrast, Sri Lanka is still in the nascent stages of being recognized as a gastro-tourism destination, although it holds immense potential. Sri Lankan cuisine, with its aromatic spices, coconut-based dishes, and unique regional variations, offers an authentic culinary experience gaining popularity among tourists seeking a less commercial and more genuine encounter (Wickramasinghe and Jahufer, 2020).

As Sri Lanka continues to develop its gastro-tourism offerings, leveraging its rich culinary heritage and regional specialties can attract food enthusiasts and curious travellers seeking new and authentic culinary experiences. With its diverse landscapes, cultural richness, and warm hospitality, Sri Lanka stands poised to become a future gastro-tourism destination.

The culinary industry is known to expand interest through various channels, including food shows, storytelling, online cooking shows, and recipes, attracting more consumers. Culinary tourism, described as travellers specifically visiting an area for its food, is a growing market that can significantly contribute to the economy. It encompasses food festivals, cooking schools, wineries, restaurants, farm tours, local markets, food shows, and luxury retreats, gaining popularity worldwide. With a significant portion of tourism spending directed towards food, culinary tourism seamlessly combines local cuisine, culture, health, and weather into an economically viable travel experience (Phaninee, Nathatene and Teresa, 2020).

In the evolving landscape, food has become a new social capital, transforming culture into a living assembly of utility. Culinary tourism, distinguished by travellers seeking unique and experiential encounters, is the fastest-growing concept in business. It not only influences the local economy but also satisfies the growing demand for experiential travel. Culinary tours involve exploring local markets, interacting with food producers and farms, and participating in cooking classes, offering authentic experiences and benefits rooted in local traditions (Thomas, 2023).

2.3 *Sri Lanka and Food Culture*

The local and traditional cuisine of Sri Lanka epitomizes the harmonious coexistence of cultural diversity and human wisdom, forming a cultural heritage developed over generations. In Sri Lankan culture, food is revered with deep respect, gratitude, and generosity, evident in the act of sharing and offering to others, animals, and gods. This cultural richness contributes significantly to Sri Lanka's identity, shaped by traditions and practices passed down for over 2000 years, with festivals being a prominent attraction for tourists. Religion plays a pivotal role in influencing the art, architecture, sculpture, and cuisine, reflecting the cultural signature of the country.

Central to understanding Sri Lankan culture is delving into its food culture, characterized by rich natural flavours and a unique combination of spices. Curry, a distinctive feature, underscores the importance of spices, which are key to Sri Lankan cuisine (Thomas, 2023 ; Fernando *et al.*, 2021). Local ingredients play a crucial role in Sri Lankan cuisine, with herbs and spices not only enhancing flavour but also possessing medicinal properties, making them a unique and valuable attraction for tourists.

Sri Lankan cuisine offers a diverse array of curries, sambals, and specialties, with street food, such as kottu, gaining popularity among tourists. Fusion cuisines, blending contributions from various ethnic groups, further enrich the culinary landscape (Wickramasinghe and Jahufer, 2019). Traditional Sri Lankan sweets, associated with festivals, attract foreigners, offering a unique culinary experience. Additionally, Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic society results in distinct food cultures, with differences observed among Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhalese cuisines.

As part of the global culinary tapestry, Sri Lankan food culture weaves a story of culinary practices, customs, and cooking styles that have evolved across diverse societies. It mirrors the history, geography, agriculture, and trade patterns of the region. The complexity of global food culture is a testament to human creativity and adaptability, expressed through ingredients, cooking methods, and local traditions. Culinary practices transcend geographical boundaries, influenced by migration, trade, and globalization, resulting in fusion cuisines and global food trends.

Amidst the challenges faced by the Sri Lankan economy, there exists a latent powerhouse—gastro tourism. The untapped potential within this culinary odyssey emerges as a beacon of hope for revitalizing the nation's ailing economy. This study serves as a guiding light, illuminating the transformative role that gastro tourism can play. In navigating the intricacies of visitor perspectives, the research unveils a promising pathway to not only uplift the economic landscape but also to celebrate and share the diverse culinary heritage of Sri Lanka with the world.

Gastro Tourism has the potential to significantly contribute to the revival of Sri Lanka's economy by combining cultural heritage with culinary techniques. This specialized form of tourism provides a distinct chance to attract people from around the world while also strengthening local industries. Important aspects of Gastro Tourism encompass the establishment of food festivals, culinary tours, and farm-to-table experiences, which showcase the wide range of gastronomic options available in Sri Lanka (Wicramasooriya, 2023; Putra, 2019). In addition, the research is centred on improving infrastructure, implementing strategic marketing campaigns, and forming relationships with international tour operators in order to optimize the effectiveness of these projects. The study attempts to provide precise recommendations for utilizing culinary diversity to enhance economic development by thoroughly examining these specific issues.

By integrating knowledge from prior studies, one can achieve a well-rounded viewpoint that takes into account both supporting and conflicting evidence. Dabi, Choudhary and Sharma (2022) highlight that a comprehensive dining experience, which includes factors such as ambiance, comfort, and cultural relevance, is essential for the success of Gastro Tourism. This comprehensive methodology enables a detailed comprehension of how these experiential elements can augment Sri Lanka's attractiveness to tourists. This literature review serves as a foundation for a comprehensive examination of Gastro Tourism as a catalyst for economic development in Sri Lanka. It provides a novel viewpoint on strategies for economic recovery by focusing on culinary exploration (Munasinghe, Gunawardhana and Ariyawansa, 2021; Deyshappriya and Nawarathna, 2020). This research seeks to combine various elements in order to shed light on how Sri Lanka's culinary heritage can be used to stimulate economic revitalization. It aims to celebrate the country's abundant gastronomic traditions while promoting sustainable development and cultural exchange (Vidya Nagar, 2021; Manola and Koufadjakis, 2019).

3. Methodology

This study embraces an interpretivism research philosophy, frequently utilized in the social sciences, to delve into the personal meanings individuals associate with their experiences. Employing an inductive approach, the research process focuses on gathering and analyzing specific observations,

thereby deriving broader insights. The chosen research design is qualitative, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences of Sri Lankan-bound tourists.

3.1 Sampling Technique and Selection.

The methodology employed in this study prioritized a thorough participant selection process, aiming to include individuals with extensive knowledge and experience in Sri Lankan food culture and who have experienced other national cuisines. The purposive sampling technique was utilized, guided by specific criteria:

1. Participants must be tourists, excluding residents or expatriates of Sri Lanka.
2. Participants should have a reasonable knowledge of the economy and economic affairs and have visited other countries that promote gastro tourism.
3. Participants are required to have a stay in Sri Lanka exceeding two weeks, covering all nine provinces of the country.
4. Participants must have experienced Sri Lankan cuisine during their stay, showcasing familiarity with the diverse array of food offerings in the country.

These criteria were thoughtfully formulated to guarantee that the chosen respondents are passionate food enthusiasts equipped with a comprehensive understanding of Sri Lankan cuisine. Their experiences are expected to encompass savouring dishes that represent the entirety of the country, rather than being confined to a specific region or province. Additionally, the participants are required to possess knowledge about economic affairs and have encountered cuisines from various other countries. This ensures a diverse and informed perspective in the study. Twenty (20) respondents were carefully selected based on the specified criteria, and detailed profiles of each participant are outlined in Table 1. These individuals were discovered during visits to hotels, food markets, and vacation spots, where interviews were conducted, each lasting between 20 to 40 minutes.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Respondent Number	Country	Profession
Respondent 1	China	Academician
Respondent 2	Philippines	Businessmen
Respondent 3	France	Businessmen
Respondent 4	India	Travel Journalist
Respondent 5	Thailand	Entrepreneur
Respondent 6	Australia	Academician
Respondent 7	Korea	Businessmen
Respondent 8	Australia	Businessmen
Respondent 9	Russia	Event Planner
Respondent 10	Malaysia	Academician
Respondent 11	Japan	Retired Government Servant
Respondent 12	UK	Academician
Respondent 13	Turkey	Businessmen
Respondent 14	Italy	Businessmen
Respondent 15	Brazil	Academician
Respondent 16	Ukraine	Businessmen
Respondent 17	USA	Tourism Industry Professional
Respondent 18	China	Entrepreneur
Respondent 19	Russia	Businessmen
Respondent 20	UK	Academician

The sample is a diverse and well-suited study cohort for examining the economic dimensions of gastro tourism. The inclusion of academicians, businessmen, travel journalists, entrepreneurs, retired government servants, event planners, and tourism industry professionals ensures a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The mix of professions enriches the study with a variety of experiences, ensuring a holistic exploration of the economic facets of gastro tourism.

3.2 *Data Collection Technique*

The data collection technique employed for this study was in-depth interviews, a qualitative method that facilitated the extraction of rich and detailed insights from participants regarding their experiences with Sri Lankan cuisine and gastro tourism. This approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of the subject, capturing the depth and complexity of participants' perspectives and experiences. The question guide is attached in Appendix 2.

3.3 *Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Study*

Ensuring the trustworthiness of the study was paramount. To achieve this, the research adhered to Tracy's (2010) criteria, which included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria served as a robust framework to maintain the quality and accuracy of the research, ensuring that the findings genuinely reflected the experiences and perspectives of the participants. By addressing these elements, the study aimed to establish a foundation of reliability and authenticity.

3.4 *Analysis Method*

For data analysis, the study employed thematic analysis, a method that involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns, themes, and meanings within the qualitative data. This analytical approach offered a systematic and rigorous way to derive insights from the collected information, providing a comprehensive understanding of the various experiences and perspectives shared by participants. The thematic analysis allowed for the exploration of recurring themes, enabling the study to draw meaningful conclusions and contribute valuable insights to the broader field of gastro tourism and its economic implications.

In the data management process, a combination of coding and grouping techniques was employed to ensure effective organization. Every interview transcript underwent careful review, with relevant excerpts systematically coded to unveil emergent themes. Leveraging MAXQDA software facilitated this coding process, enhancing efficiency and precision. These coded segments were then methodically grouped to delineate overarching themes, fostering a comprehensive understanding of participant perspectives. Examples of the coding, grouping, and memoing of the respondent data are included in Appendix 3.

3.5 *Ethical considerations*

Preserving the anonymity of the participants was a paramount consideration throughout the research process. To uphold confidentiality and protect the privacy of individuals involved in the study, each participant was assigned a unique identifier or code. This ensured that their responses and insights could be analyzed and reported without revealing their personal details. The consent form given to participants is attached in Appendix 1.

During the in-depth interviews, participants were consistently referred to by their assigned codes rather than their actual names. This approach was implemented to minimize the risk of unintentional disclosure of identities during the data collection and analysis phases. Additionally, any potentially

identifying information shared by participants, either verbally or in written form, was carefully omitted or generalized in the reporting of findings.

4. Analysis

The primary aim is to distil and interpret the multifaceted perspectives, experiences, and insights shared by participants regarding the role of gastro tourism in revitalizing the Sri Lankan economy. This analytical journey is guided by the overarching theme of uplifting the economic landscape of Sri Lanka through the lens of culinary exploration.

The analysis unfolds across three distinct yet interconnected themes, each scrutinizing a crucial facet of the economic revitalization process initiated by gastro tourism. From exploring the economic stimulus generated by this gastronomic endeavour to understanding the nuanced interplay between cultural identity and economic growth, and finally, unravelling the socio-economic dynamics that underpin sustainable practices, our thematic analysis aims to extract meaningful narratives that contribute to the broader discourse on Sri Lanka's economic resurgence.

4.1 Economic Transformation Through Culinary Experiences

Economic Transformation Through Culinary Experiences. Gastro tourism, with its focus on the fusion of vibrant flavours and cultural narratives, emerges not only as a gustatory adventure but also as a powerful catalyst for economic metamorphosis. This theme investigates into the intricate interplay between culinary exploration and economic revitalization, shedding light on how the palate, when paired with experience, becomes a dynamic force propelling Sri Lanka into a new era of economic vibrancy. In the words of the respondents.

“Gastro tourism serves as a dynamic force in reshaping the economic landscape, transforming culinary experiences into powerful drivers of local economic growth.” - Respondent 4

“The economic impact of gastro tourism is evident in the significant rise in tourist spending on culinary delights, creating a positive ripple effect that stimulates various sectors of the Sri Lankan economy.” – Respondent 5

The provided statements underscore the transformative influence of gastro tourism on the economic dynamics of Sri Lanka. The first statement emphasizes the dynamic force of gastro tourism, portraying it as a catalyst in reshaping the economic landscape. This suggests a paradigm shift where culinary experiences cease to be merely gastronomic and take on a pivotal role in steering local economic growth.

The second statement explores the tangible economic impact of gastro tourism, particularly highlighting the surge in tourist spending on culinary delights. This expenditure is portrayed as a key driver creating a positive ripple effect across multiple sectors of the Sri Lankan economy. The language used implies a direct correlation between the gastronomic choices of tourists and the broader economic prosperity, emphasizing the interconnectedness of culinary tourism and overall economic stimulation. Together, these statements contribute to the narrative of gastro tourism as a potent force in driving economic transformations in Sri Lanka.

“Culinary exploration, a cornerstone of gastro tourism, acts as a catalyst for economic revitalization, fostering a symbiotic relationship between tourists' culinary expenditures and the thriving local economy.” – Respondent 2

“As visitors immerse themselves in Sri Lanka’s rich culinary offerings, they contribute substantially to economic stimulus, injecting life into businesses, markets, and job markets across the country.” – Respondent 9

“Beyond the plate, the economic influence of gastro tourism is profound, sparking a renaissance in Sri Lanka’s hospitality and culinary sectors and positioning them as key players in the nation’s economic narrative.” – Respondent 20

The provided statements shed light on the significant role of gastro tourism in uplifting the economy of Sri Lanka.

The responses articulate how culinary exploration, a fundamental aspect of gastro tourism, serves as a catalyst for economic revitalization. It highlights the establishment of a symbiotic relationship between the expenditures of tourists on culinary experiences and the flourishing local economy. This suggests that the act of exploring and enjoying local cuisine directly contributes to the economic well-being of the community.

The statements further emphasize the economic impact by illustrating how visitors’ engagement with Sri Lanka’s diverse culinary offerings contributes substantially to economic stimulus. The injection of life into businesses, markets, and job markets is presented as a direct outcome of tourists immersing themselves in the local culinary scene. This underscores the economic interconnectedness between gastro tourism and the vitality of various economic sectors.

The statement further extends the economic influence of gastro tourism beyond the immediate act of dining. It portrays the profound economic impact by describing the phenomenon as sparking a renaissance in Sri Lanka’s hospitality and culinary sectors. These renaissance positions these sectors as integral players in the broader economic narrative of the nation. In essence, it suggests that the economic influence of gastro-tourism goes beyond immediate financial transactions, contributing to the overall economic rejuvenation and growth of the country.

4.2 Empowerment of Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses

The theme of “Empowerment of Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses” emerges as a focal point of significance. Gastro tourism, with its transformative influence, has not merely been about savouring diverse culinary delights but has played a pivotal role in fostering the empowerment of local entrepreneurs and small businesses. This theme highlights the dynamic relationship between the burgeoning gastro-tourism industry and the entrepreneurial spirit that thrives on presenting authentic and unique experiences. As we navigate through the narratives of those whose ventures have been uplifted by this culinary phenomenon, a compelling story unfolds, underscoring how the economic empowerment of entrepreneurs becomes an integral chapter in Sri Lanka’s journey toward sustainable growth.

“Gastro tourism has been a game-changer for local entrepreneurs. The influx of visitors seeking authentic culinary experiences has provided a platform for small businesses to thrive, contributing significantly to economic growth.” – Respondent 19

“The impact of gastro tourism on empowerment is tangible. The exposure and support from tourists who value local experiences have empowered entrepreneurs to expand and showcase the richness of Sri Lankan cuisine.” – Respondent 12

“The empowerment of entrepreneurs through gastro tourism is remarkable. Small businesses, especially those in the culinary sector, benefit from increased visibility and customer engagement, fostering a vibrant economic ecosystem.” – Respondent 17

The statements highlight a transformative narrative where gastro tourism emerges as a catalyst for the empowerment of local entrepreneurs. The influx of visitors actively seeking authentic culinary experiences is portrayed as a game-changer, providing a valuable platform for small businesses to not only survive but thrive in the local economic landscape. The tangible impact is reflected in the exposure and support garnered from tourists who place value on authentic local experiences. This, in turn, empowers entrepreneurs to expand their ventures, showcasing the richness of Sri Lankan cuisine. The emphasis on increased visibility and customer engagement underscores the vibrant economic ecosystem fostered by gastro tourism, positioning entrepreneurs in the culinary sector as key contributors to the country’s economic growth.

“Gastro tourism has empowered local entrepreneurs by creating opportunities for them to showcase their unique offerings. Visitors, intrigued by the authenticity of the culinary ventures, have played a crucial role in sustaining and uplifting small businesses.” – Respondent 16

“I’ve witnessed firsthand how gastro tourism empowers entrepreneurs and small businesses. Tourists actively seek out local experiences, providing a lifeline for small businesses to flourish and contribute to the economic fabric of Sri Lanka.” – Respondent 19

The notion that gastro tourism has created opportunities for entrepreneurs to showcase their unique offerings suggests a platform that enables businesses to stand out and attract visitors. The active role played by tourists, intrigued by the authenticity of these culinary ventures, is depicted as a pivotal force in sustaining and uplifting small businesses. The direct observation, “I’ve witnessed firsthand,” adds a personal touch, reinforcing the authenticity of the experiences shared. The use of terms like “lifeline” and “contribute to the economic fabric” underscores the vital role of gastro tourism in not only supporting individual businesses but also enriching the broader economic landscape of Sri Lanka.

4.3 Cultural Diplomacy Driving Economic Integration

Cultural diplomacy, particularly in the context of gastronomic exploration, has emerged as a significant force driving economic integration. Through the lens of culinary experiences, tourists inadvertently engage in a form of cultural diplomacy that transcends geographical boundaries. This theme explores how the vibrant tapestry of Sri Lankan culture, expressed through its diverse culinary offerings, serves as a catalyst for economic integration. By delving into the narratives and perspectives of tourists, we unravel the intricate connections between cultural diplomacy, economic collaboration, and the profound impact of gastro tourism on fostering unity in diversity, and thereby the economic development. In the respondents’ words.

“Culinary exploration in Sri Lanka has become a powerful form of cultural diplomacy, fostering economic integration by creating a bridge between tourists and the rich culture of the country.” – Respondent 4

“Through the lens of gastronomy, tourists actively engage in a form of cultural diplomacy that transcends borders, contributing to economic integration by establishing a shared appreciation for Sri Lanka’s diverse cultural heritage.” – Respondent 7

“Gastro tourism acts as a cultural ambassador, driving economic integration as tourists become not just consumers of local cuisine but active participants in the preservation and celebration of Sri Lanka’s cultural identity.” – Respondent 1

These statements highlight the pivotal role of culinary exploration in Sri Lanka as a potent instrument of cultural diplomacy, facilitating economic integration. The metaphorical bridge built through the shared experience of gastronomy connects tourists with the country’s rich cultural heritage. The act of engaging in culinary experiences becomes more than a mere transaction; it transforms into a meaningful interaction that transcends geographical boundaries.

The lens of gastronomy becomes a unique perspective through which tourists actively contribute to cultural diplomacy. Their participation in and appreciation of Sri Lanka’s diverse culinary landscape fosters a shared understanding and respect for the country’s cultural identity. Gastro tourism, in this context, is portrayed as a cultural ambassador, not only introducing tourists to local cuisine but also involving them in the preservation and celebration of Sri Lanka’s cultural heritage. As a result, the economic integration becomes intertwined with a deeper, more immersive form of cultural exchange, creating a symbiotic relationship between tourism, cultural diplomacy, and economic collaboration.

“The economic integration facilitated by gastro tourism is intertwined with cultural diplomacy, as tourists, through their culinary experiences, contribute to the mutual understanding and appreciation between Sri Lanka and the global community.” – Respondent 10

“As tourists explore Sri Lanka’s culinary landscape, they unintentionally engage in cultural diplomacy, fostering economic integration by creating a mutual exchange that extends beyond monetary transactions to cultural appreciation.” – Respondent 17

“The economic impact of gastro tourism is complemented by its role in cultural diplomacy, where tourists’ exploration of local cuisine becomes a powerful driver for economic integration, promoting cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.” – Respondent 6

These statements further emphasize the symbiotic relationship between economic integration and cultural diplomacy facilitated by gastro tourism. The intertwining of these elements is evident as tourists, through their culinary experiences, contribute to a mutual understanding and appreciation between Sri Lanka and the global community. The economic integration becomes a natural byproduct of this cultural exchange, highlighting the interconnectedness of economic and cultural dimensions.

The unintentional engagement in cultural diplomacy by tourists exploring Sri Lanka’s culinary landscape is portrayed as a meaningful and impactful aspect of their journey. This engagement goes beyond monetary transactions, fostering a mutual exchange that not only contributes to the economic fabric but also enhances cultural appreciation. Gastro tourism is presented as a multi-faceted phenomenon where the economic impact is complemented by its role in cultural diplomacy. The exploration of local cuisine by tourists becomes a powerful driver for economic integration, promoting cross-cultural understanding and collaboration between Sri Lanka and the global community.

4.4 Holistic Development: Jobs, Skills, and Heritage Preservation

This theme emphasises the multifaceted impact of gastro tourism on the overall development of the nation. Beyond the immediate economic gains, it explores how this culinary exploration contributes

to the creation of employment opportunities, the development of essential skills, and the preservation of Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage. By shedding light on these interconnected aspects, the theme underscores the transformative role of gastro tourism in fostering holistic development and positioning itself as a catalyst for progress in Sri Lanka.

"Gastro tourism in Sri Lanka goes beyond being a culinary adventure; it actively contributes to job creation and economic growth. As tourists explore local cuisines, they create demand, supporting the growth of businesses and generating employment opportunities in the hospitality and culinary sectors." – Respondent 11

"The holistic impact of gastro tourism extends to skills development, especially in the culinary arts. As local chefs and food artisans engage with tourists seeking authentic experiences, there is a valuable exchange of knowledge and skills, contributing to the enhancement of the country's culinary expertise." – Respondent 15

"Gastro tourism acts as a guardian of Sri Lanka's culinary heritage by fostering the preservation of traditional culinary practices. Tourists, eager for authentic experiences, become active participants in the continuation of age-old cooking methods, recipes, and culinary rituals." – Respondent 18

The statements emphasize the multifaceted impact of gastro tourism on Sri Lanka's economy and cultural heritage. The economic role of gastro tourism extends beyond its culinary aspects. Tourists exploring local cuisines generate demand, leading to the growth of businesses and the creation of employment opportunities in the hospitality and culinary sectors. This demonstrates the significant economic contribution of gastro tourism in driving job creation and overall economic growth.

Gastro tourism has an educational aspect, emphasizing the exchange of knowledge and skills between local chefs, food artisans, and tourists seeking authentic experiences. This interaction enhances the country's culinary expertise, acting as a catalyst for skill development that benefits local practitioners and contributes to the overall culinary landscape. Gastro tourism is positioned as a preserver of Sri Lanka's culinary heritage. Tourists actively participate in the continuation of traditional cooking methods, recipes, and culinary rituals, showcasing the role of gastro tourism in safeguarding and promoting the rich culinary traditions of the country. This aligns with the broader theme of heritage preservation through culinary exploration.

"The intersection of gastronomy and tourism results in a cultural exchange that promotes Sri Lanka's rich heritage. Tourists, through their culinary explorations, become ambassadors of the country's diverse culture, supporting the preservation and promotion of Sri Lanka's unique identity." – Respondent 6

"Holistic development through gastro tourism includes a focus on sustainability. Tourists increasingly seek eco-friendly and sustainable culinary experiences, encouraging local businesses to adopt environmentally conscious practices, contributing to the long-term health of both the environment and the economy." – Respondent 19

"Gastro tourism fosters community involvement and empowerment by creating opportunities for local communities to actively participate in the tourism value chain. From small-scale producers to traditional artisans, the economic benefits are distributed, leading to a more inclusive and holistic development approach." – Respondent 13

The synergy between gastronomy and tourism in Sri Lanka results in a dynamic cultural exchange that serves as a catalyst for the preservation and promotion of the country's rich heritage. As tourists embark on culinary explorations, they transcend the role of mere visitors, evolving into cultural ambassadors who actively contribute to the diverse cultural tapestry of Sri Lanka. This symbiotic

relationship reinforces the unique identity of the nation, creating a positive feedback loop where cultural appreciation and preservation are mutually reinforced.

Moreover, the concept of holistic development within the realm of gastro-tourism extends beyond cultural aspects to incorporate sustainability. Tourists, increasingly conscious of environmental concerns, seek eco-friendly and sustainable culinary experiences. This trend prompts local businesses to adopt environmentally conscious practices, fostering a sustainable approach that benefits not only the environment but also the long-term health of the economy.

In addition to cultural and environmental considerations, gastro-tourism plays a pivotal role in community involvement and empowerment. By creating opportunities for local communities, including small-scale producers and traditional artisans, to actively participate in the tourism value chain, economic benefits are distributed more inclusively. This community-centric approach aligns with a holistic development strategy that goes beyond economic growth to embrace the empowerment and engagement of local communities in the broader context of Sri Lanka's culinary and tourism landscape.

4.5 Sustainable Growth and Rural Economic Upliftment

The theme of "Sustainable Growth and Rural Economic Upliftment" stands as a testament to the country's commitment to responsible and eco-friendly practices. This theme encapsulates the intertwining journey of tourists seeking sustainable culinary experiences and the positive impact it yields on rural economies. Sri Lanka's gastronomic landscape has evolved beyond mere consumption, embracing a holistic approach that prioritizes ethical, environmental, and social considerations. As tourists actively engage in sustainable practices, they become catalysts for rural economic upliftment, fostering a harmonious balance between the thriving gastro tourism industry and the well-being of local communities. This theme unfolds the narrative of a conscious and symbiotic relationship, where sustainable growth echoes through the picturesque landscapes of rural Sri Lanka, echoing the resilience and prosperity of its communities.

"Tourists engaging in sustainable gastro tourism activities actively support the economic upliftment of rural areas in Sri Lanka, fostering a positive impact on the livelihoods of local residents and promoting sustainable growth practices." – Respondent 4

"Sri Lanka's commitment to sustainable culinary practices not only enhances the gastronomic experiences for tourists but also plays a crucial role in uplifting rural economies, creating a harmonious balance between tourism and community development." – Respondent 8

"By choosing sustainable options in gastro tourism, tourists become agents of positive change, contributing to rural economic upliftment and ensuring that the benefits of tourism reach the grassroots level of Sri Lankan communities." – Respondent 1

"Tourists seeking sustainable growth in their culinary experiences directly contribute to the economic upliftment of rural areas in Sri Lanka, supporting local businesses that prioritize ethical and environmentally conscious practices." – Respondent 6

"The link between sustainable growth and rural economic upliftment in Sri Lanka's gastro tourism is a testament to the country's commitment to responsible tourism, providing tourists with meaningful and eco-friendly experiences while positively impacting local communities." – Respondent 14

The active involvement of tourists in sustainable gastro-tourism activities serves as a linchpin for fostering positive change in the rural areas of Sri Lanka. Beyond being mere culinary enthusiasts, tourists become advocates for economic upliftment, directly impacting the livelihoods of local residents and cultivating sustainable growth practices.

Central to this narrative is Sri Lanka's unwavering commitment to sustainable culinary practices, which not only elevates the gastronomic experiences for tourists but also plays a pivotal role in the upliftment of rural economies. The harmonious balance struck between tourism and community development is a hallmark of Sri Lanka's approach to ensuring that the benefits of its flourishing gastro-tourism industry reach the grassroots level of local communities.

The conscious choices made by tourists in opting for sustainable options within the realm of gastro tourism position them as agents of positive change. Their contributions go beyond the enjoyment of diverse and ethical culinary experiences; they actively contribute to the economic upliftment of rural areas. This support is particularly vital for local businesses that prioritize ethical and environmentally conscious practices, creating a ripple effect of positive impact in Sri Lanka's rural landscapes.

The interconnection between sustainable growth and rural economic upliftment in Sri Lanka's gastro tourism is more than a testament; it is a reflection of the country's steadfast commitment to responsible tourism. In providing tourists with meaningful, eco-friendly experiences, Sri Lanka ensures that its thriving gastro-tourism industry becomes a force for good, positively influencing the lives of local communities and fostering a sustainable legacy for generations to come.

5. Discussion

The primary objective of this study is to identify how Gastro tourism can be a transformative force in changing the Sri Lankan economy. This study followed a qualitative research design with an interpretivism philosophy to collect and analyze data with the aim of answering the research question. As per the findings of the in-depth interviews, all the emerging themes point out how gastro tourism can be used to uplift and change the Sri Lankan economy. According to the findings of Manola and Koufadakakis (2019), the potential of gastro tourism to boost local economies is backed up by the findings of this study. Many tourists seek authentic experiences of the country they are visiting which creates a lot of opportunities for small and medium scale entrepreneurs. The amount of empowerment gained by small and medium-scale businesses through this helps them to expand and create more opportunities such as more employment opportunities within the rural economies which impacts the country's overall economic growth(Everett and Slocum, 2013)

As the literature review highlights, Sri Lankan cuisine encompasses a rich cultural heritage developed and maintained over the years. According to Privitera *et al.* (2018) and Manola and Koufadakakis (2019) tourist experiences go even deeper when people come in contact with the local cuisines of the tourist destination and in some situations results in extending the stay time of the tourists (Chigozie, 2015; Glasgow, 2015; Manola and Koufadakakis, 2019). As highlighted by Naruetharadhol and Gebombut (2020),the majority of the spending of tourists is on food. Hence, the various cuisines of Sri Lanka help the tourists understand and embrace the cultural values of the country whilst encouraging them to buy more local products (Dabi, Choudharyand Sharma, 2022)

The authenticity and legacy of regional cuisines are frequently at the center of gastrotourism. A destination can be developed by showcasing the allure of regional cuisines and customary cooking techniques, claim Hall and Sharples (2008). According to the analysis researcher has identified the cultural and religious influences on the gastro tourism. With its diverse cultural influences on its rich

culinary legacy, Sri Lanka can draw and keep visitors looking for a true cultural experience by prioritizing authenticity.

Infrastructure development and the availability of suitable cooking facilities are essential for the success of gastrotourism. According to the guest perspective understanding guest needs, tailoring the experiences and meeting expectations, and ensuring a high standard of hospitality are the main aspects that tourists are looking for in Sri Lanka. Getz and Brown (2006) emphasize the need of fully operational kitchens, cooking workshops, and food festivals. This conclusion is supported by the study, which highlights the necessity of comprehensive growth and economic integration in the gastro tourism industry. Moreover, putting money into this kind of infrastructure in Sri Lanka has the potential to spur economic growth throughout the region in addition to drawing tourists.

Working together with regional food enterprises is essential to creating a vibrant and sustainable gastrotourism industry. Creating alliances with fishers, farmers, and food markets improves authenticity and makes visiting tourists' experiences richer. According to Jamal and Robinson (2011), these cooperative initiatives improve the gastronomic experience while simultaneously bolstering sustainability and economic vibrancy. Such efforts could also be extended to nearby communities in Sri Lanka.

It is imperative to consider tactics that are advantageous to both hosts and guests in order to fully utilize gastrotourism as a weapon for economic regeneration (McCabe and Foster, 2006) and it could also be used in Sri Lanka. Empirical strategies that complement current findings include promoting Sri Lankan food as a unique attraction and engaging local communities through training initiatives and community-based food festivals. Through this, foodies can be drawn in by showcasing Sri Lankan food as a gourmet destination using unique branding and marketing techniques.

In conclusion, the complex interactions between cultural heritage, real food experiences, infrastructure development, and cooperative efforts with local companies demonstrate the potential of gastro tourism to completely change Sri Lanka's economy. Accepting these conclusions and putting them into practice will help Sri Lanka become known as a top travel destination for people looking for authentic, immersive cultural and culinary experiences, which will promote sustainability and economic progress.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the thematic analysis presented here delves into the multifaceted impact of gastro tourism on the economic revitalization of Sri Lanka. Through three interconnected themes, this exploration has uncovered the transformative power of culinary experiences, the empowerment of entrepreneurs, the role of cultural diplomacy in economic integration, and the holistic development achieved through job creation, skills enhancement, and heritage preservation. Additionally, the analysis extends to the sustainable growth and rural economic upliftment fostered by responsible gastronomic practices.

The first theme, "Economic Transformation Through Culinary Experiences," highlighted how gastro tourism acts as a dynamic force reshaping the economic landscape of Sri Lanka. Participants emphasized the role of culinary exploration as a catalyst for economic revitalization, contributing to revenue generation, employment opportunities, and a broader renaissance in the hospitality and culinary sectors.

The second theme, "Empowerment of Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses," underscored the game-changing impact of gastro tourism on local entrepreneurs. By providing a platform for small

businesses to thrive, contributing significantly to economic growth, and fostering increased visibility, gastro tourism has become a vital force in supporting the economic ecosystem of Sri Lanka.

In the third theme, “Cultural Diplomacy Driving Economic Integration,” the analysis revealed how gastronomic exploration serves as a powerful form of cultural diplomacy, creating a bridge between tourists and the rich cultural heritage of Sri Lanka. The economic integration resulting from this cultural exchange positions gastro tourism as a key driver of economic collaboration and cross-cultural understanding.

The fourth theme, “Holistic Development: Jobs, Skills, and Heritage Preservation,” explored the multifaceted impact of gastro tourism beyond economic gains. The creation of employment opportunities, skills development, and the preservation of culinary heritage emerged as crucial aspects contributing to the overall development of the nation.

The fifth theme, “Sustainable Growth and Rural Economic Upliftment,” highlighted the conscious choices made by tourists in opting for sustainable options within gastro tourism. This has positioned tourists as agents of positive change, actively supporting the economic upliftment of rural areas and ensuring a harmonious balance between tourism and community development.

In summary, the thematic analysis paints a comprehensive picture of gastro tourism as a transformative force in Sri Lanka’s economic resurgence. Beyond being a mere gastronomic adventure, it emerges as a catalyst for change, fostering economic vibrancy, empowering local businesses, promoting cultural diplomacy, contributing to holistic development, and embracing sustainable practices. As Sri Lanka continues to position itself as a gastro-tourism destination, the insights gathered in this study provide valuable perspectives for policymakers, businesses, and the broader community to leverage the potential of gastronomy for sustainable economic growth and cultural enrichment.

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*Appendix**Appendix 1: Participant Consent Form***Participant Consent Form****Title of Study: Revitalizing the Sri Lankan Economy: An In-Depth Exploration of Gastro Tourism****Introduction:**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by MBA Undergraduate of the SLIIT Business School. The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of gastro tourism in revitalizing the Sri Lankan economy from the perspective of visitors.

Purpose of the Study:

The objective of this study is to understand how gastro tourism can serve as a catalyst for economic upliftment in Sri Lanka. We aim to gather qualitative insights from visitors about their experiences, preferences, and perceptions related to gastro tourism in Sri Lanka.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to: Participate in an interview to provide detailed information about your experiences and opinions regarding gastro tourism in Sri Lanka.

The interview will take approximately 40 minutes.

Information Collected:

During the interview, we will ask for non-identifiable information, such as:

- The country you are from
- The countries you have visited
- Your Profession

No other personal identifying information will be collected.

Risks and Discomforts: There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. However, you may choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer and can stop the interview at any time without any consequences.

Benefits: While there are no direct benefits to you for participating, your responses will contribute to a better understanding of how gastro tourism can be leveraged to boost the Sri Lankan economy. This could potentially lead to improved tourism strategies and economic policies.

Confidentiality: All information collected in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will be anonymized, and no personal identifying information will be attached to any data you provide. Data will be stored securely and only accessible to the research team.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw, any data you have provided will be destroyed and not included in the study.

Consent: By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understand the information provided above, and you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

*Appendix 2: Question Guide***Question Guide****Title of Study: Revitalizing the Sri Lankan Economy: An In-Depth Exploration of Gastro Tourism****Introduction:**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to explore how gastro tourism can help revitalize the Sri Lankan economy from the perspective of visitors. Your insights are invaluable and will contribute significantly to understanding this potential.

This interview will take approximately 40 minutes.

Instructions for Interviewer:

- Make sure participants feel comfortable and willing to answer.
- Maintain a good rapport throughout the interview.
- Encourage participants to share detailed responses and explore their answers further based on their responses.

Questions:**Introduction to Gastrotourism**

- 1 Have you heard about gastrotourism before?
- 2 How do you understand the term “gastrotourism”?
- 3 Follow-up: Can you provide any examples of gastrotourism experiences you are familiar with?

Perceptions of Sri Lankan Cuisine

- 1 What comes to mind when you think of Sri Lankan food?
- 2 What do you think makes Sri Lankan cuisine unique compared to other Asian cuisines?
- 3 Follow-up: Are there specific dishes or ingredients that stand out to you?

Economic Impact of Gastro Tourism

- 1 How do you think gastro tourism will contribute to the revitalization of the Sri Lankan economy?
- 2 Follow-up: Can you think of any successful examples from other countries where gastro tourism has had a significant economic impact?

Key Factors for Success

- 1 What are the key factors to focus on to get the most out of food tourism in Sri Lanka?
- 2 Follow-up: How important do you think marketing and promotion are in this context?

Challenges and Solutions

- 1 What challenges do you expect in the experience of enjoying food tourism in Sri Lanka?
- 2 How can these problems be effectively addressed?
- 3 Follow-up: Have you faced or heard of similar challenges in other countries?

Visitor Experiences

- 1 Can you describe any memorable experiences you've had with Sri Lankan food?
- 2 Follow-up: How did these experiences compare with your food experiences in other countries?

Future of Food Tourism

- 1 What are your hopes and expectations for the future of food tourism in Sri Lanka?
- 2 How can individuals and organizations contribute to the development of food tourism in Sri Lanka?
- 3 Follow-up: Are there any particular initiatives or programs you think would be beneficial?

Cultural Exchange

- 1 How important is cultural exchange in the context of food tourism for you?
- 2 Follow-up: Can you share an experience where you felt a strong cultural connection through food?

Closing.

Appendix 3: Coding and grouping of codes.

Theme	Quotes	Codes	Memoing
Economic Transformation Through Culinary Experiences	“Gastro tourism serves as a dynamic force in reshaping the economic landscape, transforming culinary experiences into powerful drivers of local economic growth.” - Respondent 4 “The economic impact of gastro tourism is evident in the significant rise in tourist spending on culinary delights, creating a positive ripple effect that stimulates various sectors of the Sri Lankan economy.” – Respondent 5 “Culinary exploration, a cornerstone of gastro tourism, acts as a catalyst for economic revitalization, fostering a symbiotic relationship between tourists’ culinary expenditures and the thriving local economy.” – Respondent 2 “As visitors immerse themselves in Sri Lanka’s rich culinary offerings, they contribute substantially to economic stimulus, injecting life into businesses, markets, and job markets across the country.” – Respondent 9 “Beyond the plate, the economic influence of gastro tourism is profound, sparking a renaissance in Sri Lanka’s hospitality and culinary sectors and positioning them as key players in the nation’s economic narrative.” – Respondent 20	Economic Impact, Catalyst, Culinary Exploration, Economic Stimulus, Economic Influence	The economic impact of gastro tourism is evident not only in the rise in tourist spending on culinary delights but also in the revitalization of various sectors of the economy. This suggests that culinary exploration has transcended its gastronomic domain to become a significant driver of economic growth.
Empowerment of Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses	“Gastro tourism has been a game-changer for local entrepreneurs. The influx of visitors seeking authentic culinary experiences has provided a platform for small businesses to thrive, contributing significantly to economic growth.” – Respondent 19 “The impact of gastro tourism on empowerment is tangible. The exposure and support from tourists who value local experiences have empowered entrepreneurs to expand and showcase the richness of Sri Lankan cuisine.” – Respondent 12 “The empowerment of entrepreneurs through gastro tourism is remarkable. Small businesses, especially those in the culinary sector, benefit from increased visibility and customer engagement, fostering a vibrant economic ecosystem.” – Respondent 17 “Gastro tourism has empowered local entrepreneurs by creating opportunities for them to showcase their unique offerings. Visitors, intrigued by the authenticity of the culinary ventures, have played a crucial role in	Game-Changer, Empowerment, Remarkable, Visibility, Lifeline	The influx of tourists seeking authentic culinary experiences has provided local entrepreneurs with a significant opportunity to showcase their unique offerings. This has led to increased visibility and customer engagement, contributing to the growth of small businesses in the culinary sector.

	sustaining and uplifting small businesses.” – Respondent 16		
	“I’ve witnessed firsthand how gastro tourism empowers entrepreneurs and small businesses. Tourists actively seek out local experiences, providing a lifeline for small businesses to flourish and contribute to the economic fabric of Sri Lanka.” – Respondent 19		
Cultural Diplomacy Driving Economic Integration	“Culinary exploration in Sri Lanka has become a powerful form of cultural diplomacy, fostering economic integration by creating a bridge between tourists and the rich culture of the country.” – Respondent 4	Cultural Diplomacy, Economic Integration, Cultural Ambassador, Mutual Understanding, Mutual Exchange	Culinary exploration serves as a unique form of cultural diplomacy, fostering economic integration by bridging the gap between tourists and the rich cultural heritage of Sri Lanka. This suggests that gastronomy plays a significant role in promoting mutual understanding and appreciation between different cultures, ultimately contributing to economic collaboration and integration.
	“Through the lens of gastronomy, tourists actively engage in a form of cultural diplomacy that transcends borders, contributing to economic integration by establishing a shared appreciation for Sri Lanka’s diverse cultural heritage.” – Respondent 7		
	“Gastro tourism acts as a cultural ambassador, driving economic integration as tourists become not just consumers of local cuisine but active participants in the preservation and celebration of Sri Lanka’s cultural identity.” – Respondent 1		
	“The economic integration facilitated by gastro tourism is intertwined with cultural diplomacy, as tourists, through their culinary experiences, contribute to the mutual understanding and appreciation between Sri Lanka and the global community.” – Respondent 10		
	“As tourists explore Sri Lanka’s culinary landscape, they unintentionally engage in cultural diplomacy, fostering economic integration by creating a mutual exchange that extends beyond monetary transactions to cultural appreciation.” – Respondent 17		
Holistic Development: Jobs, Skills, and Heritage Preservation	“Gastro tourism in Sri Lanka goes beyond being a culinary adventure; it actively contributes to job creation and economic growth. As tourists explore local cuisines, they create demand, supporting the growth of businesses and generating employment opportunities in the hospitality and culinary sectors.” – Respondent 11	Job Creation, Skills Development, Culinary Heritage, Cultural Exchange, Sustainability	The holistic impact of gastro tourism extends beyond economic benefits to encompass skills development, heritage preservation, and sustainability. This suggests that culinary exploration plays a vital role in fostering a comprehensive approach to development that considers social, cultural, and environmental aspects.
	“The holistic impact of gastro tourism extends to skills development, especially in the culinary arts. As local chefs and food artisans engage with tourists seeking authentic experiences, there is a valuable exchange of knowledge and skills, contributing to the enhancement of the country’s culinary expertise.” – Respondent 15		

“Gastro tourism acts as a guardian of Sri Lanka’s culinary heritage by fostering the preservation of traditional culinary practices. Tourists, eager for authentic experiences, become active participants in the continuation of age-old cooking methods, recipes, and culinary rituals.” – Respondent 18

“The intersection of gastronomy and tourism results in a cultural exchange that promotes Sri Lanka’s rich heritage. Tourists, through their culinary explorations, become ambassadors of the country’s diverse culture, supporting the preservation and promotion of Sri Lanka’s unique identity.” – Respondent 6

“Holistic development through gastro tourism includes a focus on sustainability. Tourists increasingly seek eco-friendly and sustainable culinary experiences, encouraging local businesses to adopt environmentally conscious practices, contributing to the long-term health of both the environment and the economy.” – Respondent 19
